



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

MONTANA WOLF PROGRAM WEEKLY REPORT

To: Interested Parties

From: MFWP Wolf Program Coordinator, Carolyn Sime

Subject: Wolf Program Activities and Related Information, October 25 - 31, 2008

Contributors to the Montana Wolf Weekly are Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP), Universities, USDA Wildlife Services (WS), the National Park Service (NPS; Glacier NP; Yellowstone National Park will be reported in the Wyoming Wolf Weekly), US Forest Service, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and the Blackfeet Nation.

Highlighted activities relate to: monitoring, wolf – livestock interactions, outreach and education, research, law enforcement, and other miscellaneous topics of public interest. The Weekly Report will be available on each Monday, covering the previous week. It and other wolf program information (including the 2007 annual report) can be found at: <http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/default.html>.

Wolf Monitoring Activities

Laudon and Wilson have been surveying 4 areas of suspected pack activity around the Thompson Falls greater area from 10/12-10/22.

On the 23rd, Wildlife Services darted and collared a female pup from the Jack Creek pack opportunistically while they were working in the area.

Kris Boyd and Shona Wilson have completed the field season. Kris will be using this time off to complete her Masters Thesis on elk nutrition in the Olympic Peninsula, WA. Shona Wilson has moved on to work at the historic Augusta Check Station this hunting season. Thanks for all the hard work and dedication!

Flights: Laudon conducted a round of regular monitor flights 10/24-10/28.

FWP encourages hunters, landowners, and other outdoor enthusiasts to report wolves through the online reporting button or to send in one of the pre-printed postcards available at all FWP offices, many US Forest Service offices, and license providers throughout the state. Information provided by the public helps FWP more accurately monitor wolf numbers and distribution in Montana.

Wolf - Livestock Activities

On the 23rd, WS removed a male pup from the Centennial pack as had been authorized. Control work is complete and the permit issued to the livestock producer has been cancelled.

On the 28th, 2 wolves were lethally removed from the Hog Heaven Pack in response to a depredation earlier in October. This makes a total of 7 wolves removed from this pack. The Hog Heaven pack, or at least the 2 radio collared animals, may be connecting with another pack or have extended its territory. Either way we now know that there is a minimum of 5 wolves, and perhaps as many as 9 or more, wolves left in that pack. Cattle are coming off of the grazing allotments, but the area occupied by the pack also encompasses private land with other livestock.

On the 29th, another llama was killed on private land near Niarada. This is the second or third confirmed loss on the same property this year. The Hog Heaven pack was known to be in the area and 8-9 wolves were seen going up the ridge from the ranch. The llama ranch is within the Flathead Reservation and Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribe has the lead.

On the 30th, an uncollared gray adult male from the Skalkaho pack was killed by Wildlife Services as part of an ongoing control action to remove the remaining members of this pack. WS work is ongoing.

The pilot range rider project in the Blackfoot Valley concluded at the end of September. This project was funded by the Blackfoot Challenge in cooperation with FWP. One rider worked full time from the latter half of July through August and part time through September. This pilot project will be reviewed this fall to see how it can be improved and expanded next year.

FWP personnel replaced fladry around a private residence near Superior. The Superior pack frequently travels by the house during the winter and the owners are concerned for their 2 black labs. A dog was reported to have been killed by wolves on a neighboring property several weeks ago but the incident was not investigated.

Additional cattle losses were investigated and confirmed by WS near Wisdom and the 26th and 30th. The total is now 6 cows confirmed killed and 1 cow confirmed injured and is not expected to live. The livestock producer has also reported cattle being run through fences and has made adjustments in the operation to decrease risk of additional losses. WS efforts to remove 2 wolves are ongoing and the SOS permit remains valid. Traps were pulled during the opening weekend of hunting season, but are set again. Aerial efforts have been ongoing. A collar may also be placed in the group if an opportunity comes up.

Outreach and Education Activities

Nothing to report.

Research Activities

Nothing to Report.

Law Enforcement and Related Activities

On the 30th, a dead black male pup was retrieved by FWP Warden Mike Fegely on the side of the Dry Creek road near Superior. The pup had multiple broken leg bones and injuries consistent with a vehicle collision. It was likely a member of the Superior pack, which frequents the Dry Creek area.

On the 28th, a Murphy Lake wolf was found dead in the Trego area. USFWS and FWP law enforcement are conducting a criminal investigation.

Other

Wolf Litigation:

On Friday July 18, 2008, the U.S. Federal District Court in Missoula, Montana, issued a preliminary injunction that immediately reinstated temporary Endangered Species Act protections for gray wolves in the Northern Rockies. The Court found that: 1) Plaintiffs were likely to prevail on the merits of their claim that the NRM gray wolf had not met its recovery criteria due to a lack of genetic exchange between the Greater Yellowstone Area (“GYA”) and the other northern Rocky Mountain populations; 2) Plaintiffs were likely to prevail on the merits of their claim that Wyoming's 2007 regulatory framework was an inadequate regulatory mechanism; and 3) immediate potential harm existed because of lax defense of property statutes and public hunts planned for Fall 2008.

On September 22, 2008, the federal government requested that the Court allow it to voluntarily withdraw its decision to delist wolves and re-evaluate information and make a new decision. The USFWS had concluded that this was the best and most timely way to resolve the issues flagged in the injunction ruling and on which the Court had indicated it was likely to rule against the federal government. USFWS asked to get the final rule back in its hands to closely review the Court's ruling, the final rule, the administrative record, any new information, and then consider whether modifications or some other action might be warranted. USFWS had also stated its intent to conduct further rulemaking – that is to consider any new information and possibly solicit public comment on any new information and revise its final decision.

On October 14, 2008 the court granted the request. In granting the request, the Court officially relisted wolves as endangered across northern Montana and experimental, non-essential across southern Montana under the federal Endangered Species Act. Wolves were also returned to the federally-listed status in Idaho, Wyoming, Utah, Oregon, and Washington. The Court also dismissed the case without considering its merits, ending the lawsuit.

NEW -- Delisting Update:

On October 24, 2008 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced it is reopening the public comment period on its proposal to delist the gray wolf in the northern Rocky Mountains. Through a notice in the Federal Register scheduled to publish on October 28, 2008, USFWS is asking the public to provide comments and any additional information on the February 2007 proposal to delist wolves. The Service is seeking additional information on a variety of topics related to the delisting. More details are available in the Federal Register notice which will be posted along with associated materials at the Service's northern Rocky Mountains wolf website: <http://westerngraywolf.fws.gov>.

The public will have until November 28, 2008, to submit their comments to the Federal eRulemaking Portal at <http://www.regulations.gov> or via U.S. mail or hand delivery to: Public Comments Processing, Attn: RIN 1018-Au53; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 222; Arlington, VA 22203.

Current Management in Montana:

FWP, through an interagency cooperative agreement, is still the lead agency for all wolf conservation and management (within the bounds of federal regulations) so long as adequate federal funding continues to be made available. FWP will continue to monitor wolves, do public outreach, and guide and direct research activities. No public hunting or trapping is allowed. USDA Wildlife Services is still the agency to investigate causes of injured or dead livestock and carry out FWP's decisions to address conflicts, as guided by federal regulations. Montana will continue to stay involved in litigation and any future delisting developments and will continue to seek the most efficient, successful path to delisting. FWP will also continue its collaborative work with Montana Tribes, other state and federal agencies, and the Montana Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Program.

Check the wolf pages on the FWP website for important information and updates:

<http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/default.html>.

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To learn more about Montana's wolf population, the Montana program and to help FWP monitor wolves by reporting wolf sign, visit FWP at: www.fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf.

To anonymously report a dead or injured wolf or suspected illegal activity, call: 1-800-TIP-MONT.

To request an investigation of injured or dead livestock, call USDA Wildlife Services directly in western Montana / Helena area at 458-0106 or in eastern Montana / Columbus area at: 322-4303. Or call your nearest FWP representative to have your call referred to Wildlife Services.

If you have a confirmed or probable livestock loss due to wolves, USDA Wildlife Services will supply you with a copy of the Loss Reimbursement Application form. For more information, see <http://liv.mt.gov/liv/LM/index.asp>. Or, contact the Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Program Coordinator George Edwards at the Montana Department of Livestock at 444-5609.